

Training Wheels by Turn_of_the_Sonic_Screw

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Summary:

Jane wants a bike; Jim can't say no.

Training Wheels

Author's Note:

beta by imaginary_golux

I usually go with El, but Jane seemed like the right fit for this fic.

Inspired by teaching Best Beloved how to ride a bike.

“I want a bike,” Jane announced one day over dinner.

Hopper put down his fork and chewed over her words instead. “A bike, huh? Going to go riding off to Chicago?”

“No.” This, she had decided, was home. Not with her sister; not with her mother and aunt. Not (yet) with Mrs. Byers, though her friends were wagering on when Dad would finally ask her out.

“Hmm.” That was good, Jane thought. Hmm wasn’t no, and that meant she could wear him down. She tried not to abuse this power. “Those boys going to teach you? Because I don’t know how much free time I’m going to have.”

“They will.” She hadn’t asked them yet, but she doubted that Mike would refuse the chance to spend time with her. She tried not to abuse that power either.

Hopper looked at her carefully. It wasn’t that he couldn’t afford a bike. It wasn’t that he couldn’t teach her. Hell, teaching a girl—his daughter—how to ride a bike would be the first time he was on familiar ground since he found her starving in the woods.

The problem was knowing what a bike would mean for her. Hopefully now that Jane had started school and they hadn’t seen anything more of the Upside Down for months, she could start living something approaching a normal life...which was what he was worried about. He had been kidding about her biking to Chicago, but Jane was moody, to put it generously. Volatile. If she decided to take her bike and go, there wouldn’t be anything he could do to stop her,

and if someone unscrupulous found her...

He sighed. Who was he kidding? First, that there was anything he could do to stop her from doing whatever she wanted once she set her formidable mind to it. Second, that he was going to miss the chance to share a fundamental childhood experience like learning to ride a bike with her. Besides, it would mean she wouldn't have to ride on the back of that Wheeler kid's bike any more. If she was going to fawn over someone, Jane could do worse, but she could stand to have a little independence. "Alright, kiddo, you won me over. You get your homework done, and I'll take you shopping for a bike this Thursday when I get off work, and on Saturday we'll throw it in the trunk, drive out to that old vacant lot out on Robard Lane, just me and you, okay?"

Jane's grin shone kilowatts back at him.

Saturday couldn't come soon enough, as far as Jane was concerned. Nearly everything she owned was second-hand, inherited from Hopper or one of her friends. However, her sleek black bike (picked out with some advice) was all hers. She loved it, and nearly tore the knee of her coveralls swinging her leg over the bar. "Wait," Hopper's voice boomed. Again with the waiting, Jane thought, and fought the urge to roll her eyes or glare at him. "Just walk it around the lot. Hands on the handlebars. Get used to how it feels to control it."

That concept wasn't unfamiliar to her. Granted, driving two wheels and some aluminum tubes wasn't quite as high-stakes as being able to banish demons with her mind, but skills needed work. Besides, she could be patient once she had what she wanted in her hands. Speaking of which...

Jane kicked up her kickstand and took a long, slow lap around the lot, just guiding the bicycle in a circle, testing the brakes as she did so. "Now what?" Her leg was a little sore from where the pedal had banged against her calf, but she didn't mind.

"Have a seat, but don't go anywhere." She nodded and swung her leg up and over the bike frame. She had to balance on the tips of her toes

to keep from falling over. "Okay, that's too tall, especially to start out with." He pulled a wrench from the back of his truck and lowered the seat a couple inches. "Try it again, kiddo."

This time her feet rested comfortably on the asphalt (tarmac, macadam, pavement. Why were there so many words to learn for the same boring thing? Probably because there was so much of it). "Pedals?" He had taken them off while he was fiddling with the seat.

"You don't need them yet. Just walk it in a circle around the lot. Get used to turning it, braking it. Then we'll go on to coasting, and maybe you can take her for a spin next time." He was just glad that he had done a little research on how to teach an adult (God, that word scared him) how to bike, because he doubted Jane would appreciate him trying to hold onto her handlebars or the back of her seat.

"This time," Jane insisted.

"I don't want you to get burnt out," Hopper cautioned. "It can be tricky, and I don't want you to use your powers." That earned him half an eye-roll, but Jane nodded her acquiescence, making her curls bob. Shit, he realized, should he have gotten her a helmet? He knew the others didn't wear them, but that wasn't a great reason not to be safe. He looked up to watch Jane finish her walking lap and start kicking off to coast. "Looking good!" He called. Terrifying, but good.

Jane bit her lip, her hands white-knuckled on the grips. "Just relax," Hopper said, clapping his hands once. This was ridiculous. She had mastered enough algebra, history, and biology to start the ninth grade with her friends. She had lived on her own in the woods in the dead of winter. She had killed a man with a twitch of her head. She was *not* going to be defeated by a plaything. She pushed off again, fighting the urge to balance herself with her powers. "Once you can coast for twenty seconds, I'll put the pedals back on."

"Promise?"

"Promise." He supposed he couldn't blame her for wanting to cram as much of being a kid in as possible. "But *no cheating*."

"Promise," she replied reluctantly. One, two, three, four. Feet down. She sighed, and tried again, and again. Four, five, six. Why was this so difficult? She looked over at Hopper, who was beaming. She pushed off, again and again. One, two, three. Three. Five this time. Three. *Two*. Seven! Six. Six. Six, seven, eight, nine! Nine again! Hopper gave her a thumbs-up. It kind of felt like flying. Five. Four. Eight! Nine, ten, and she waggled the handlebars to steady herself. Oh, that worked. She grinned back at Hopper and pushed off again with a ferocious determination. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. Almost there, she thought, stumbling a little.

"Almost there, short stack." Was this what being a dad felt like? The pride, the fear, the love? How had he forgotten what being a dad was like?

Oh. Right. His daughter had died and he'd put away every memory like news clippings in the box under the floor. And now he had been given another chance, with a teenager, a warrior. A kid who really could do anything she put her mind to. He watched her, her brow creased and dark as she focused on her balance, her denim-clad legs wobbling. "No cheating," he reminded her.

"Not cheating! Promise." He watched her, tongue caught between her teeth, and counted twenty-three until she finished her coast. "Pedals," she demanded. Hopper coughed at his little tyrant. "Pedals, please, Dad?"

He grinned and bolted them back in place. "Go on, kid. You earned this." He caught her by the shoulder before she leapt back onto her bike. "Just-- just promise me you'll have fun, okay? Not treat it like a chore to master." Or, god help him, a way to spend more time unsupervised with Wheeler.

Jane considered her dad's words. It was rare that she learned to do something purely for fun. Not that riding a bike wouldn't be useful for getting around town. But, she mused as she pushed off, she could see why the boys seemed to bike everywhere. (Getting Max to teach her how to skateboard would be its own challenge.) Her feet found the rhythm of the pedals, and with no obstacles in the unused lot, she could just focus on the flying sensation, going faster and faster and faster...

“Slow down!” Hopper barked behind her, and she shook as she turned instinctively toward the sudden noise, the front wheel swerving back and forth. She lost control and as her stomach twisted, she reached out with her gift and caught herself, bike and all. “You okay, kid?” he asked, voice surprisingly close and tender.

“Yeah.” She looked up at him, where he had sprinted to catch her, boots crunching on the gravel. “I’m fine.” Still, she put the kickstand down and clambered off, legs shaking.

“You went too fast and almost crashed,” he pointed out.

“Stupid. I know.”

“Stupid, yeah, and careless,” Hopper agreed. “But that’s okay.” Her dark eyes snapped over to his from their distant wandering. “Here, now...you get to be a stupid, careless kid. New experience for you...not so much for me. But you’re fourteen, and you deserve to have fun, and you deserve to get to be a stupid careless kid. Just, uh, don’t use that against me, okay?”

Jane smiled shyly. “Promise.” She looked down at her legs; they had stopped trembling. (If Dustin were here, she suspected, he would say something about inhibited fear response.) “Try again?” she asked hopefully.

Hopper ruffled her messy curls. “Yeah, kid. Try again.” They didn’t have anywhere to be, and there was plenty of light left.

Author's Note:

In my mind, Jane is riding a black Hutch BMX.
<http://classiccycleus.com/home/repair/museum-bikes-1966-to-1985/>